

WINCHESTER GEESE

By Maggie Smith

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Draft Two

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“And outcasts always mourn.”
-Oscar Wilde, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”

CHARACTERS

CECILY — one of the Winchester Geese, died in 1616 from syphilis at 27, bitter and believes she deserves better (female, open ethnicity)

AVIS — died unidentifiable on the street at 19 in 1801, guilt-ridden but hopeful she'll see her family again (female, open ethnicity)

BRIDGET — a member of the working poor, died in a workhouse accident that was covered up in 1746 at age 42, maternal, strong-willed but not optimistic (female, open ethnicity)

THE MOURNERS — those who enter the graveyard and put ribbons onto the gate; never speak, can be played by the actors playing Avis, Bridget, and Cecily, completely different actors, crew members doing transitions. There's options.

SETTING

The Crossbones Graveyard, Southwark, London. Present Day, Only After Dusk

NOTES

The Crossbones Graveyard is a real location in London where the “Outcast Dead” were buried until the mid-1800's. Because of this, when designing the show, I recommend that you look at photos of the actual location. I'm definitely not saying to replicate it exactly, but just study it enough to get the vibe that it gives off: respectful, but celebratory. A good starting point is the ribbons tied to the gates.

My one requirement about the set: Absolutely NO headstones. The graveyard was an unmarked grave for anyone who wasn't allowed to have a Christian burial. This is why the ribbons on the gate are so important; they are the makeshift headstones.

Between each scene there should be a transition showing that time has passed. This should be done with lighting effects to signal how many days have gone by. Some stage directions have a specific amount of time that's passed, while others are open-ended and can be up to the production.

When I say the casting has open ethnicity, **I mean open ethnicity**. Don't just cast white people because you think it would be “historically accurate.” It wouldn't be. It'd just be mean. The races of the characters don't define them in any way, so make the cast diverse.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE
SO WE'RE ALL DEAD, IT SEEMS

[The Crossbones Graveyard, Southwark, London. Dusk. Eyes should go immediately to the gate, covered in brightly colored ribbons, photos, and anything else that could be viewed as a respectful remembrance. Each ribbon has a name, maybe more. The graveyard is taken care of, with stone benches to sit on, flowers and shrines, anything to make it seem like a graveyard, save actual headstones. CECILY is lounging on one of the benches, AVIS is across from CECILY, staring at her. Both are frozen. BRIDGET is facing outward, and addressing the audience directly, almost out of her own reality.]

BRIDGET

The first thing you don't know about death: If you die with your eyes open, they're going to feel dry for the rest of eternity.

[CECILY and AVIS unfreeze, mid-argument. CECILY is rubbing her fingernails against the fabric of her skirt furiously. BRIDGET has heard this all before, and is barely interested. She is still staring outward.]

CECILY

They don't actually care. They only like the aesthetic of it.

AVIS

The aesthetic? They're actively mourning.

CECILY

Mourning people they never knew.

AVIS

It's sweet.

CECILY

It's sick. And fake. They don't feel sad, they just want to be a part of our tragedy.

AVIS

And what tragedy are we a part of?

CECILY

I don't know. Death? The patriarchy? A systematic oppression? Give me some time and I'm sure I can come up with something. The point is, it's romanticizing us. They think they're being profound or poetic when they take pictures on one of these benches or tie a ribbon on the gate with some fake tears in their eyes. You know, I've seen at least three ribbons get tied to the gate this week with some bullshit names of people who were never actually buried here, just so they can seem like they're doing some dead girl a service. But it's just some type of morbid ceremony they put themselves through so they feel in touch with their emotions.

AVIS

No. No, they're not just using us, they're— What are you doing? Stop that.

[CECILY looks down at her nails as she stops rubbing them against her skirt.]

CECILY

There's dirt underneath my nails.

AVIS

Don't do that. It's annoying.

CECILY

So are you.

[CECILY continues rubbing her nails. AVIS is about to interject but is stopped by BRIDGET.]

BRIDGET

[Absentmindedly] Joan's gone.

AVIS

[Abruptly forgetting about the argument] She is?

BRIDGET

Someone tied a ribbon with her name on it earlier this morning. And no one's seen her since.

AVIS

And her daughter?

BRIDGET

Clara? She's still here.

AVIS

Poor girl. But it's good that Joan's gotten to move on.

CECILY

Yeah. Good for Joan. Bad for us.

BRIDGET

Bad how?

CECILY

Well, we're still here, aren't we?

BRIDGET

Yes...

CECILY

So it's bad for us. There's one less space on the gate for one of our names.

AVIS

We can build more gates.

CECILY

She shouldn't be gone. One of us should've gotten to leave.

BRIDGET

If it wasn't Joan, then it could've been anyone else.

CECILY

Then why wasn't it me?

AVIS

Can't you think about how happy she is? Seeing everyone she left for the first time in centuries.

[Beat] You know that's what I miss the most.

CECILY

Can we not do this again?

AVIS

I'm going to see them again. My sisters, my mother and father. All of them.

CECILY

[To BRIDGET, not whining] Make her stop.

BRIDGET

[To CECILY, same tone] Let her smile.

AVIS

My youngest sister, I hate to say it but I miss her the most. She was so small. She'd fit right into my arms when I'd hug her.

CECILY

[To BRIDGET] Don't indulge this.

BRIDGET

[To AVIS, definitely indulging] And what about the others?

CECILY

Stop talking. Stop talking.

AVIS

There was Margaret, but my mother called her Missy. She was untamable. A lot like Cecily.

CECILY

Are you going to elaborate on that?

[AVIS shrugs.]

CECILY

Then are you done?

AVIS

I'll be done.

CECILY

Good. Because after having to sit through that speech for what must be the millionth time I definitely deserve to move on instead of Joan.

BRIDGET

Move past it. It's over.

CECILY

I can be upset.

AVIS

Keep it to yourself.

BRIDGET

That's not what I said. *[Beat, quieter]* I would've phrased it kinder.

[The graveyard is silent, but not uncomfortable. The tension slowly rises within CECILY, but the other two don't notice, until she finally speaks.]

CECILY

But can you honestly say that you're happy for Joan?

BRIDGET

Of / course.

AVIS

Yes.

CECILY

And can you say that you'd rather Joan move on from the graveyard than you?

[There's a hesitation from BRIDGET and AVIS.]

CECILY

Well?

BRIDGET

No one wants to be here.

CECILY

So is that a yes?

BRIDGET

I wouldn't take away her place wherever she is now.

CECILY

You won't admit it, but you'd take her place in a heartbeat if someone offered it to you.

AVIS

Of course she wouldn't. She's not a selfish person.

CECILY

I'm selfish for wanting what's best for me?

AVIS

You're selfish for choosing your own happiness over someone else.

CECILY

No. It's self-preservation. If I could've watched another girl die instead of me I would have.

AVIS

That's horrific.

CECILY

That's life. You end up dead if you don't think for yourself.

AVIS

You thought for yourself and look where you are now.

CECILY

[Beat, almost impressed if she weren't mad] Don't twist my words.

AVIS

I didn't twist your words, I said exactly what you did.

BRIDGET

This isn't worth the fight. Cecily, Joan deserves to move on. End of story.

CECILY

It's not a black and white issue.

AVIS

It is. You're wrong. I'm right.

BRIDGET

Avis.

AVIS

No. You said the fight is over. It is. I'm not arguing about this anymore. It's done.

[AVIS begins to exit. BRIDGET and CECILY watch her go, frozen. Transition into:]

ACT ONE
SCENE TWO
I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE MY ONLY FRIEND, I HATE YOU

[There shouldn't be much of a difference between this and the former scene. Maybe a few more pictures on the gate, but not many. It doesn't take place too long after the first scene, definitely not the same day. CECILY and BRIDGET are frozen as they watch AVIS leave. AVIS stops right before she exits, and speaks as the transition is occurring.]

AVIS

The second thing you don't know about death: Time moves so fucking slowly.

[AVIS exits. Immediately after the transition ends, BRIDGET and CECILY are watching AVIS from a distance. BRIDGET sighs and turns.]

CECILY

Is there a reason she isn't speaking to me? *[Beat]* Or looking at me? *[Beat]* Or standing near me?

BRIDGET

She just wants to be alone.

CECILY

It's not like I'd be mad if she weren't talking to me on purpose. I might even like it.

BRIDGET

Just let her be.

CECILY

I think I would like it. In fact, I know I would— I know I would like it.

BRIDGET

Why?

CECILY

If she doesn't want to talk to me then I don't have to talk to her. And I don't like talking.

BRIDGET

I know. But don't you think you'd be lonely without anyone to talk to?

CECILY

One thing I know now: I will never feel alone. Probably because I'll never be alone. No offense.

BRIDGET

Why would I be offended?

CECILY

Well, it's not like you'll be leaving here any time soon. We've been here for, what, three hundred years? It's like we're stuck in some kind of purgatory. *[Beat]* Have we thought about that? Is this purgatory? Why haven't we talked about that?

BRIDGET

No, we did. We decided against that.

CECILY

We did? When?

BRIDGET

Which time?

CECILY

We've done it more than once?

[BRIDGET nods.]

CECILY

The first time.

BRIDGET

I'd have to guess at least a century ago. You bring it up at least once every... fifteen years? About?

CECILY

Oh. Well I think we're in purgatory. I think we are. We have to be, there's no other solution.

BRIDGET

Not everything needs to have a / solution.

CECILY

[Already made up her mind] We're in purgatory.

[There's a silence between the two.]

BRIDGET

Are you religious?

CECILY

[Not a real question] What?

BRIDGET

Well, you've never mentioned—

CECILY

That's invasive.

BRIDGET

There is quite literally no possible way to be invasive at this point.

CECILY

[Immediately] I'm not.

BRIDGET

Oh.

CECILY

It's just... There's so many goddamn Catholics.

BRIDGET

You weren't Catholic when you were alive?

CECILY

No, they wouldn't let me in a church. It's just, all they talked about was Heaven, and the afterlife, and "doing things for the glory of God." And I think I don't know what to believe in. There has to be something after this, right? *[She doesn't wait for an answer.]* Maybe not Heaven. Maybe not with God. I know Avis thinks there is one but... I didn't know then and I don't know now. I just think if there is, then why are we here? Because I'd hear Christians say that everyone is

CECILY (cont.)

equal in God's eyes, so then why are we stuck here? But I guess that equality is only for the Catholics... Goddamn Catholics.

BRIDGET

[Beat] I don't know what to say.

CECILY

I don't want you to say anything.

BRIDGET

I've never heard you talk about this.

[AVIS enters.]

CECILY

I told you. I don't like to talk.

AVIS

Hi.

CECILY

[Immediate] No.

AVIS

I didn't ask you a question.

CECILY

Good. Don't make any statements, either.

[AVIS walks to the bench BRIDGET is on and sits next to her.]

AVIS

[Under her breath, sarcastic] 'Swell.

CECILY

What did you just say?

AVIS

'Swell?

CECILY

Don't say that. No one says that.

AVIS

I heard a girl say it the other day.

CECILY

It was ironic. Leave the 20's in the 20's.

AVIS

Ironic?

CECILY

[More aggressive than she should be] She was probably being sarcastic, mocking someone who's here, I don't know.

[AVIS stands and abruptly exits.]

CECILY

God. Sometimes I wonder how she can be so naive.

BRIDGET

She died young.

CECILY

She was nineteen. That was practically middle-aged back then.

BRIDGET

[Letting out a slight laugh] That's still not a lot of time. You had eight more years before you died, imagine the impact eight years could have.

CECILY

I guess. *[Beat]* Do you know?

BRIDGET

Do I know what?

CECILY

You know. How she died?

BRIDGET

[Beat] I... *[Thinking carefully about what to say]* They found her body in the streets.

CECILY

I know that. But what else?

BRIDGET

Have you asked her?

CECILY

No.

BRIDGET

Why?

CECILY

Because I can't stand her.

BRIDGET

Then why do you want to know?

CECILY

She knows about us. Why shouldn't we know about what happened before she died?

BRIDGET

She may not remember it.

CECILY

I remember the syphilis. And you remembered the— What was it, a machine?

BRIDGET

The roof caved in.

CECILY

Roof, whatever. When it fell, you remember that, right? The only thing that I don't remember is between when I died and when I was buried.

BRIDGET

But no one remembers that.

CECILY

Exactly. That's it. Nothing else. So then why would Avis forget about anything else?

BRIDGET

It's not your job to pry.

CECILY

I have a right to know.

BRIDGET

You don't have a- She'll tell you when she's ready.

CECILY

I'll tell you as soon as she tells me.

[BRIDGET doesn't answer. The two freeze, facing each other on opposite benches. Transition into:]

**[END OF SAMPLE. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
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